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ASPECTS OF OREGON HISTORY BEFORE 1840.*

Of all the centennial anniversaries of events occurring more than one century ago that have so thickly strewn the lives of the present generation, the one at which we are gathered possesses the unique distinction of celebrating the first contribution of the United States Government to the great work of exploring the surface of the earth, which was initiated in systematic form by Prince Henry of Portugal, almost five hundred years ago. Not only was the Lewis and Clark expedition the first that our government undertook, but it has retained a place higher in popular interest than its successors in the interior, like those of Pike and Long, or upon the ocean, like that of Wilkes.

Even more singular than this distinction of the Lewis and Clark celebration is the fact that in successive years should come the anniversaries of the acquisition of Louisiana and the exploration of the Oregon Country, one the greatest stroke of fortune in our history, the other, the execution of a long-considered project of Thomas Jefferson designed to open up the way for transcontinental commerce and to extend human knowledge. To what other president in our history has it been granted to bring to completion two such momentous achievements whose centennial anniversaries have been or will be celebrated with truly national interest and meaning? Of these two transactions the acquisition of the western half of the Mississippi Valley looms largest in our national history; but it redounds less to the credit of Jefferson than this great plan, so early framed and so promptly executed, when he

*Address at the Historical Congress, Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition, Portland, Oregon, August 21, 1905.

had the power, of exploring the vast unknown regions of the upper waters of the Missouri and the western slopes of the Rockies. Between the date of his first interest in the project and its execution Mackenzie reached the Pacific far to the north and Gray discovered the mouth of the great river which Indian report had long vaguely described. Both of these events increased his interest in the design in which he had been encouraged by his French correspondents whose fellow-countrymen had first conceived the idea three quarters of a century before.¹

I have ventured in this brief comparison of these two achievements of Jefferson's presidency to ascribe the higher degree of credit to his initiation of the Lewis and Clark expedition, because it was not, like the acquisition of Louisiana, a happy accident, brought about to all appearance by the conjunction of the pressing necessities of the western settlers and the revulsion of Napoleon from plans of restoring France's empire in America, in which he had no original interest and from which he drew back with alacrity at the first serious reverses; but was on the other hand, the product of the scientific instinct, of that reaching out of the imagination toward the remote future and to the ideal, which marks the highest of human achievements. These, too, are the characteristics of the history of the Oregon Country in its more general aspects.

More than any other of our territorial acquisitions or of our original area the Oregon Country stands for the continuity of the controlling interests in the great sweep of early American history. It brings down to our own time as an historic force the motive of Columbus to reach the Orient by the west and to establish commerce with it. Parallel with this great motive, to which the new world

¹ Cf. Parkman, *A Half Century of Conflict*, chs. xv and xvi, and Thwaite's *History of Rocky Mountain Exploration*.

owes its participation in the life of the old, there has been from the earliest opening of the northern regions the more immediate appeal of the fur trade, which more than any other economic interest has lifted the veil from the unknown interior of the Continent. These two influences flowed together somewhat over a century ago, and the field of their combined action was the Pacific Northwest. To that remote region the restless energy of the fur traders had penetrated in the very years when the enterprising merchants and sailors of the young United States, recently emancipated from the restraints of the British colonial system, and no longer admitted to more than a meagre share of its privileges, and still shut out from free commerce with other European colonies, sought an outlet in opening up direct trade with China. That China was a better market than Europe for furs was soon realized, and the far-seeing Astor planned a combination of the fur trade and the China trade, which in its conception was the most far-reaching commercial project which had ever been developed by a single mind in our history, and which in its political and educational results, exercised long continued influence upon the American imagination.

Again, the great pilgrimages of pioneer families to Oregon from 1843 onward reproduce more nearly than any other movements of our population the impulse, the spirit, and the character of the migration to Virginia and New England over two centuries earlier. In all these aspects early Oregon history is an epitome of American history.

Gray's discovery of the mouth of the fabled River of the West, Lewis and Clark's exploration of its course, and the treaty with Spain for the cession of the Floridas and the determination of the boundaries between the American possessions of Spain and the United States gave us our first hold on the Pacific, and fixed in a deeper sense

than before a national goal of expansion which appealed to all imaginative minds.

Henceforth in South and North, as well as West, the men whose eyes were fixed on the future whose interests were higher than cotton or the tariff, whose imagination had been kindled by the vision of a great nation stretching from ocean to ocean, more and more gathering to its broad embrace the commerce of the European world with that ancient and mysterious East, were the tireless champions of Oregon. To Oregon of all our territories in the North was there a stream of emigration from the Southern States. Oregon alone of all the territories whose acquisition has been subjected to previous popular discussion, has appealed to all sections without discrimination. Oregon was not desired to provide new territory for slavery or to preserve the equilibrium between the North and the South; nor was its acquisition opposed from similar considerations. No clash of sections, no mutterings foreboding civil war, grew out of the agitation for Oregon, as was the case with Texas; nor was the completion of our title to that part which we secured followed by crises like that precipitated by the acquisition of California simultaneously with the discovery of gold. Oregon, alone, I may repeat, was national in its appeal, looking to a future national greatness and to future international connections, alike desirable to all who had confidence in American institutions and in the capacity of man to remove physical obstacles; and Quixotic to an equal degree in the eyes of those to whom the physical obstacles seemed insuperable and of those who distrusted democratic government on the grand scale.

The second administration of James Monroe, once characterized as the Era of Good Feeling, is now universally remembered as the period of the official annunciation of the intention of the United States to play a larger part in

the development of the New World. Concurrently with the announcement that the United States would regard any attempt to control the destinies of the newly founded Spanish-American States as unfriendly, Russia was informed that we could not permit any Russian establishments on the Pacific west of the United States. This was soon followed by the renunciation by the Czar in 1824 of any territory south of the present southern boundary of Alaska, $54^{\circ} 40'$. Monroe's administration, whose foreign policy had largely been shaped on the broadest national lines by John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts, closed with the way cleared for the United States to extend to the Pacific north of the forty-second parallel except so far as a limit should be imposed by England's claims to a share in the territory south of $54^{\circ} 40'$.

The northeastern boundary at that time had remained undefined for more than a generation. It is, therefore, not strange that it did not seem practicable or necessary to settle at once the northwestern boundary, so far remote from any settled habitations. An amicable arrangement providing that the territory in dispute should be open to the citizens of both countries pending a final settlement and without prejudice to the rights of either party derived from discovery or by treaty was concluded in 1818. This "joint occupation," as it was called, was agreed upon for a period of ten years and then continued for eighteen more. It implied that the territory would ultimately be divided unless one of the two parties should relinquish everything, a most improbable outcome; or the other should endeavor to take possession of the whole by force, as the United States did later in the case of the disputed area between Texas and Mexico.

This amicable arrangement for a joint occupation of the rivers and harbors, a piece of opportunism, as to the wisdom of which opinions may differ, was the signal for

opening a campaign of education in regard to the value of Oregon designed to influence public opinion to push the claims of the United States when the time of settlement should come. From beyond the Mississippi there came at once a vigorous protest from Thomas H. Benton against any recognition of English rights on the Columbia, a protest as significant as his denunciation of the relinquishment of Texas in the Florida Treaty, on the ground that it was a dismemberment of the Mississippi Valley. It meant that the people of the West, fresh from the conquest of the farther slopes of the Appalachians, would not shrink from the Rockies, or give over the work of the pioneer until their advance line was arrested by the Pacific. Two years later in Congress, Mr. John Floyd, a representative from Virginia, began the steady agitation for the occupation of the Columbia River country by the United States.

Inasmuch as the late Frances Fuller Victor and other writers on Oregon history have ascribed to a Massachusetts schoolmaster, Hall J. Kelley, the initiation of this agitation, it will not be inappropriate on this occasion to examine somewhat in detail the character of the early Oregon movement, its sources of inspiration, and to give brief sketches of its leaders. Mr. Kelley's claims for himself seems to me greatly exaggerated, and the dates of his published writings on the Oregon question indicate, I think, that instead of influencing Floyd to champion Oregon he himself reflected the movement initiated by Floyd.

Hall Jackson Kelley was born in 1790, and graduated from Middlebury College in Vermont in 1813. He tells us in after years that he projected a settlement west of the Rocky Mountains as early as 1817. His society to establish such a settlement was not incorporated until 1829, and the date of his first publication on Oregon was apparently not earlier than 1830.

How much effective influence Kelley exerted before he enlisted the interest of Nathaniel Wyeth can not easily be determined, for we have to rely mainly on autobiographic claims of a much later date which every one would acknowledge to be exaggerated, and which can not be established by satisfactory evidence. That Kelley influenced Wyeth at the start is no doubt true, but Wyeth soon lost confidence in his judgment. That his writings were not widely circulated or generally influential is the conclusion to which I am led by such study as I have given to the question. As a bit of minor negative evidence may be mentioned the fact that the Yale Library does not contain anything from Kelley's pen, although most of the early Oregon literature is well represented on its shelves.

The case is far different with John Floyd of Virginia. To him unquestionably belongs the credit of first proposing in Congress the actual occupation of the Columbia River country by the United States Government, of promoting its settlement, and of organizing it as a territory with the name Oregon, and finally, of persistently urging these measures for years. To one freshly approaching the subject the work of Floyd for Oregon seems immensely more important than Hall J. Kelley's to whom more space is usually allotted in Oregon histories.

John Floyd was born in Kentucky of a Virginia family in 1783. His academic education was received in Dickinson College in Pennsylvania, and his professional training at the medical school of the University of Pennsylvania, where he received the degree of M. D. in 1806. He then settled in Virginia. After a brief service as a surgeon in the 1812 war, he entered the Virginia legislature in 1812. In 1817 he was elected a member of Congress where he served for twelve years, and was distinctly the leader of the Virginia delegation. In 1830 he was elected governor of the State by the Assembly, and again in 1831

reëlected unanimously. It was during his term as governor that the Southampton massacre in Nat Turner's Insurrection took place. An ardent supporter of Jackson, his belief in States rights was deeper. He sympathized with South Carolina in the contest over the tariff and nullification, and was honored by her electoral vote for the presidency in 1832. He died in 1837 at the age of fifty. His son, John Buchanan Floyd, rose to distinction in public life and became governor of the State and Secretary of War in Buchanan's administration.

The sources of Floyd's interest in Oregon are not difficult to discover. He was born on the frontier among the adventurous pioneers of Kentucky. His first cousin, Charles Floyd, was a member of the Lewis and Clark expedition, holding the rank of sergeant, and lost his life in the earlier months of its history. The friendship of William Clark, he remarked in a speech in Congress, "he had the honor to enjoy from his earliest youth,"² and his admiration for George Rogers Clark is evinced by his naming two of his sons for him.

When Floyd went to Washington in the early winter of 1820-21 he boarded at Brown's hotel with Senator Benton, where he met Mr. Ramsey Crooks of New York and Mr. Russell Farnham of Massachusetts, both of whom had been engaged in the Astoria enterprise. Mr. Crooks, who had earlier been in the employ of the Northwest Company, went overland to the Columbia with Hunt, while Mr. Farnham had gone out in the Tonquin. Benton tells us that "their conversation, rich in information upon a new and interesting country, was eagerly devoured by the ardent spirit of Floyd. He resolved to bring forward the question of occupation and did so."³ It is sufficiently clear,

² *Register of Debates of Congress* (1828-29), vol. v, p. 150.

³ Benton, *Thirty Years' View*, I, 13.

I think, that a man of such antecedents and connections was not dependent upon the Massachusetts schoolmaster either for information or stimulus.

Mr. Floyd's motion was presented December 19, 1820, and asked for the appointment of a committee to "inquire into the situation of the settlements upon the Pacific Ocean and the expediency of occupying the Columbia River."⁴ The committee was appointed and Mr. Floyd was made chairman. On January 25, 1821, he presented the report of the committee accompanied by a bill authorizing the occupation of the Columbia River.

This pioneer report, urging the occupation of the Pacific Northwest, in its expression and embodiment of the ideas and impulses that were to shape the progress of events, bears the same relation to Oregon that Richard Hakluyt's famous *Discourse on Western Planting* bears to the foundation of the English colonies in America.⁵ It is mainly interesting to us on this occasion for the evidence it presents that the political movement for the occupation of Oregon was an outgrowth of the Astoria enterprise. After discussing the nature of the title of the United States to the territory, the committee present in glowing colors the advantages to be derived by the United States from taking possession of it. The details as to the climate, the fertility of the soil, the experiences of the Astorians, the nature of the overland route and most of all the elaborate development of the capacities of the fur trade with the East and with China show unmistakably the point of view presented by the fur traders Crooks and Farnham. The Columbia River region is to be occupied as a commercial outpost and for the exploitation of its wealth.

⁴ Benton, *Abridgement of Debates of Congress*, VII, 50. Niles, *Weekly Register*, XIX, 278.

⁵ The full report is to be found in *Annals of Congress*, 16th Congress, 2d session, 946-958.

Nothing beyond the presentation of the report was accomplished at this session; but, as Benton tells us, "the first blow was struck; public attention was awakened and the geographical, historical, and statistical facts set forth in the report made a lodgment in the public mind which promised eventual favorable consideration."⁶

Nearly a year later Floyd reintroduced his resolution with some changes December 10, 1821. In its second form the resolution proposes an inquiry into the expediency of occupying the Columbia River *and the territory of the United States adjacent thereto*.⁷ Just a week later he presented an additional resolution that the Secretary of the Department of the Navy be required to report to this house the probable increase in expense in causing an examination to be made of the different harbors belonging to the United States on the Pacific Ocean, and of transporting artillery to the mouth of the Columbia River.⁸

A month later, January 18, 1822, Floyd introduced a bill which provided that the President of the United States shall be authorized and required to occupy "that portion of the territory of the United States on the waters of the Columbia River," to extinguish the Indian title, make land grants to settlers, etc., and that "when the population of the settlement amounts to 2000 souls all that portion of the United States north of the 42d parallel of latitude and west of the Rocky Mountains is to constitute a territory of the United States, under the name of the Territory of Origen" [*sic*].⁹ An outline of the proposed government then follows.

In a single year in his devotion to the Pacific Northwest Mr. Floyd advanced from the project of a commer-

⁶ Benton, *Thirty Years' View*, I, 13.

⁷ Niles, *Weekly Register*, XXI, 247.

⁸ Niles, *Weekly Register*, XXI, 270.

⁹ Niles, *Weekly Register*, XXI, 350.

cial outpost to that of a nascent state of the Union. In his first report he had thought of the settlement of the country through Chinese emigration. "It is believed," he wrote, "that population could be easily acquired from China, by which the arts of peace would at once acquire strength and influence and make visible to the aborigines the manner in which their wants could be supplied." Similarly Benton in supporting in the Senate, Floyd's early efforts, declared "The valley of the Columbia might become the granary of China and Japan and an outlet to their imprisoned and exuberant population."

Of particular interest in this second bill of Floyd's is the formal proposal January 18, 1822, to call the territory "Origion." The name Oregon was originally applied by the author of *The Travels of Jonathan Carver*¹⁰ to the fabled river of the west which appeared on the French maps about the middle of the eighteenth century. The origin or derivation of the name has never been satisfactorily explained. Made familiar by this work, the most popular book of American travels until the narratives of the Lewis and Clark expedition began to appear, it was impressively used by Bryant in his *Thanatopsis* as synonymous with the unknown remote,—

"Those continuous woods
Where rolls the Oregon and hears no sound
Save his own dashings."

After Gray's voyage the names Columbia and Oregon are used interchangeably for the river, but the circumstances of the application of the name to the territory have not before been made clear. Hall J. Kelley asserted in his later life that he first gave the name Oregon to the territory, and his claim was accepted by Mrs. Victor and in the Bancroft Histories.

¹⁰ For a critical discussion of the authenticity of Carver's *Travels* see a paper by the writer in *The American Historical Review*, January, 1906.

Kelley's first work on Oregon was published in 1830 in Boston with this title, "A Geographical Sketch of that part of North America called Oregon." Oregon is defined "as that part of North America which lies between 42d and 49th degrees north," and is west of the summit of the Rocky Mountains. It is interesting to note that in 1830 Kelley assumed that Oregon did not extend above the forty-ninth parallel. On page 7 he writes "The particular territory of which we propose some account is called Oregon; because it was included in the Louisiana purchase; and because it is watered and beautified by a river which once bore the name of Oregon, but which is now more generally and more properly called Columbia, after the name of the first American vessel that ever floated upon its waters." There is certainly no intimation here that the author is applying the name Oregon to the territory for the first time or that he had been the first to do so. Floyd's resolution that "when the population of the settlement amounts to 2000 souls, all that portion of the United States north of the 42d parallel of latitude and west of the Rocky Mountains is to constitute a territory of the United States, under the name of the Territory of Origon," antedates Kelley's book eight years.

Until an earlier suggestion than this to apply Jonathan Carver's mysterious name of the River of the West is pointed out, John Floyd of Virginia is entitled to the honor of being recognized as the the godfather of your State.

Further, I would call attention to Floyd's cautious wording in regard to the extent of the American claims in that region. No positive assertions are made. It is possible that in his resolution one month later, February 14, 1822, he intended to lead the President to commit himself on this point, for he proposes that the President inform the House whether any foreign governments have made claims

to any part of the territory of the United States on the Pacific Coast north of the forty-second parallel.¹¹

In December, 1822, Mr. Floyd made a very powerful argument in favor of his bill, which shows the results of painstaking investigation. For those who deemed the proposal "fanciful," and him a "bold projector," he recalled the rapidity with which population had spread westward between 1779 and 1822. Within the memory of living men it had moved westward upwards of a thousand miles. For those who thought Oregon too remote he asserted that now that steamboat navigation had been invented it was not farther distant in time than St. Louis had been from Philadelphia only twenty years before. For the economist and merchant he presented an elaborate study of the trade of the United States with China and the Orient, of the export trade of China, of the increasing possibilities of the fur trade, of the growing whale fishery in the Pacific. His far-seeing vision not only embraced the commerce of his own time but penetrated the future and predicted what has only recently been realized.

"The lands of the Oregon," he wrote, "are well adapted to the culture of wheat, rye, corn, barley, and every species of grain; that position will enable them to sell their surplus produce with certainty, and purchase the manufactures of China * * *."

In regard to the political expansion of this country, Mr. Floyd said: "All contemplate with joy the period when these States shall extend to the Rocky Mountains. Why not then to the Pacific Ocean?"¹² The territory will inevitably be occupied either by us and our children or by the English, Russians, or French.

¹¹ Niles, *Weekly Register*, XXI, 400.

¹² *Annals of Congress*, 17th Congress, 2d session, 408-409. The whole speech covers columns 396-409.

Mr. Floyd's ablest coadjutor in this debate was Mr. Francis Baylies of Massachusetts, an earlier Federalist, who had become a strong Jackson supporter. In Oregon histories Baylies of Massachusetts stands usually merely as a name with hardly more personality than Doctor Floyd and consequently in his case, too, I shall venture a few personal details.

Francis Baylies was born in Deighton, Mass., in 1783, and was elected to Congress in 1821, where he served six years. The next four years he was a member of the Massachusetts legislature. As a Massachusetts Federalist who voted for Jackson in the House in 1825, he was naturally not a pleasant person to John Quincy Adams, who wrote him down in his Diary as a "rank Federalist" and as "one of the most talented and worthless men in New England." In the neutral field of scholarship Mr. Baylies's activities would have secured approval rather than censure from the pungent diarist, for he wrote the best history of Plymouth Colony that was prepared before the recovery of Bradford's "*History of Plimouth Plantation*," a work which still retains its value. He was also at one time a member of the Massachusetts Historical Society. As a resident of Taunton, not far from New Bedford, Mr. Baylies enlarged upon the advantages to the whaling industry that would accrue from an American establishment upon the Pacific, a point of view effectively justified thirty years later in the development of San Francisco as a whaling port.

In regard to the political aspects of the proposed occupation of Oregon Mr. Baylies's views exhibit a remarkable breadth of view and a penetrating foresight. It having been suggested that a too widely expanding Union would be liable to disruption, he argued that expansion would be a security against disunion. "By multiplying and extending the States of the Union, you will create so many different interests that they will neutralize each other. On some

questions the interest of the Eastern and Southern States might be found to be the same; others the Eastern and Western; others the Middle States and Southern, Eastern, and Western, and so on." Then turning back and in brief strokes depicting the wonderful growth of the Union during the memory of living men, he concluded with these striking words:

Some now within these walls may, before they die, witness scenes more wonderful than these; and in aftertimes may cherish delightful recollections of this day, when America almost shrinking from the "shadows of coming events" first placed her feet upon untrodden ground, scarcely daring to anticipate the grandeur which awaited her. Let us march boldly on to the accomplishment of this important, this useful and this splendid object, and, my word for it, no one who gives his vote for this bill will repent. On the contrary, he may consider it as one of the proudest acts of his life.¹³

A few days later in reply to the argument that the Rocky Mountains were our natural boundary, Mr. Baylies replied:

As we reach the Rocky Mountains we should be unwise did we not pass that narrow space which separates the mountains from the ocean, to secure advantages far greater than the existing advantages of all the country between the Mississippi and the mountains. Gentlemen are talking of natural boundaries. Sir, one natural boundary is the Pacific Ocean. The swelling tide of our population must and will roll on until that mighty ocean interposes its waters and limits our territorial empire. Then, with two oceans washing our shores, the commercial wealth of the world is ours, and imagination can hardly conceive the greatness, the grandeur, and the power that await us.¹⁴

I have dwelt at some length on the labors of Floyd and Baylies not only because of their intrinsic importance at this stage of the Oregon question, twenty years before the popular agitation for the occupation of the country, but because it seems to me that the significance of their labors has not been adequately appreciated. Although the House

¹³*Annals of Congress*, 17th Congress, 2d session, 416, 417, 422. The speech takes up columns 413-422.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 682, 683.

of Representatives voted against acting on Floyd's bill at that session 100 to 61, the educative influence of the debate and of the committee reports should not be ignored. It bore fruit not only later in the Oregon agitation, but also contributed powerfully to strengthen the desire for California which dominated Polk's administration twenty years later. All the arguments derived from the Pacific trade, the whale fisheries, the relations with the Far East applied with even greater force to California where the splendid harbor of San Francisco, the Puget Sound harbors being then unknown or unrealized, far overtopped the mouth of the Columbia.

Mr. Floyd's efforts in the House of Representatives were earnestly seconded by Benton in the Senate, who steadily from 1821 to 1846 was the sturdy advocate of occupying the Columbia River. His interest in the question he owed to Jefferson "who projected the expedition of Lewis and Clark—to discover the head and course of the river (whose mouth was then known), for the double purpose of opening an inland commercial communication with Asia, and enlarging the boundaries of geographical science. The commercial object was placed first in his message, and as the object to legitimate the expedition. "In this respect he was distinctly less prescient of the future than Floyd and Baylies, and all that I myself have either said or written on that subject from the year 1819, when I first took it up, down to the present day when I still contend for it is nothing but the fruit of the seed planted in my mind by the philosophic hand of Mr. Jefferson."¹⁵ Benton, however, at first assumed with Jefferson that when settlements grew up west of the Rocky Mountains they would naturally become independent of the United States on account of the difficulties of intercommunication. In 1828 Benton

¹⁵ Benton, *Thirty Years' View*, I, 14.

most vigorously opposed the renewal of the treaty of Joint Occupation, and advocated the settlement by England and the United States of their respective claims.

Little progress was made for four years, but in December, 1828, Mr. Polk of Tennessee moved in the House, as an amendment to the Oregon bill, the extension of the jurisdiction of the courts of Michigan Territory beyond the Rocky Mountains between 42° and $54^{\circ} 40'$,¹⁶ and an exploration of the Pacific Coast between these points and of the Columbia River. Here is the first proposition in Congress to assert jurisdiction in "the whole of Oregon" in the sense of all the territory between California and the southern extremity of Russian America. It was this advanced position that was taken aggressively ten years later by Senator Linn of Missouri when he reopened the campaign begun eighteen years before by Floyd who was now dead. The spirit of territorial expansion was now rapidly dominating the Democratic party, and diplomatic feeling after Texas and California was begun in good earnest in the later years of Jackson's administration.¹⁷ This spirit was destined to become stronger and stronger; it reached its climax when "the reannexation of Texas and the reoccupation of Oregon" became the party cry in 1844, and bore its fruit in President Polk's stroke for California. For a time this spirit was so imperious and aggressive that it threatened war with England in its defiant shout of " $54^{\circ} 40'$ or fight."

But these matters belong to the period following that which I have selected for treatment. I will allow myself only one remark in regard to it. As one follows the history of Oregon in Congress and in public opinion from 1820 there appears to be a steady development of interest in the Pacific Northwest and an increasing diffusion of

¹⁶ The texts of this resolution as printed read $44^{\circ} 40'$, but the debates indicate that the readings should be $54^{\circ} 40'$.

knowledge in regard to its resources. The whole spirit of the West was then as now expansive, and yet it is in this period that legend has placed the extraordinary misconception that Congress and the administration were likely to relinquish Oregon to England and that Oregon was saved to the United States by private efforts counteracting governmental and public indifference. Curious as this is the explanation in some measure is more curious still. The seed of the widely spread notion that Oregon was saved to the Union was planted by one of the great champions of Oregon, Thomas H. Benton. Ever present in Benton's arguments for occupying Oregon was the apprehension that if we did not act England would secure the whole territory. First among his five reasons for such action in 1825 was "To keep out a foreign power." He dreaded for that reason a renewal of the joint occupation in 1828. So in 1841, 1842, and 1843 when President Tyler's administration seemed absorbed in the quest of San Francisco, and disposed to consider a concession of the region between the Columbia and the forty-ninth parallel to England, about half the present State of Washington as a possible equivalent for England's efforts, if they could be enlisted, in enabling us to acquire northern California and all of Texas without war, and when the President seemed to the urgent westerner indisposed to take active measures to encourage and protect emigration to Oregon before the question of boundaries should be settled, Benton felt that such a course imperiled Oregon. "The title of the country," he writes, "being thus imperiled by the Government, the saving of it devolved upon the people, and they saved it." A few sentences later he speaks of "the task of saving the Columbia" devolving

¹⁷ John Quincy Adams' diary contains much information on this question, derived from his reading of the unpublished dispatches of the Department of State.

upon some Western members of Congress upon the people; and then a little later in speaking of the emigration of 1843 and later. "A colony was planted—had planted itself—and did not intend to retire from the position, and did not. It remained and grew; and that colony of self-impulsion, without the aid of government and in spite of all its blunders, saved the Territory of Oregon to the United States."¹⁸ These sentences published in his "Thirty Years' View," in 1856, which was long accepted as a standard historical authority on this period and most widely circulated, (it is said that sixty-five thousand copies were sold soon after publication,)¹⁹ diffused the idea that Oregon was "saved" and prepared the way for the ready acceptance of other explanations of how Oregon was saved to the Union,²⁰ when as a matter of fact it is impossible to show that the part of the old Oregon territory that the United States secured was ever in any real danger of being lost. I have ventured to touch upon this matter which lies beyond the chronological boundaries of my subject because for a long time I was puzzled as to the origin of the idea that "Oregon was saved" to the Union, and now that Thomas H. Benton, the champion of Oregon for twenty-five years, appears as responsible for it, some may think that I reject it too lightly. Benton's views, however, as to the purposes of the administration to which he was hostile, are demonstrably in error, and in not a few instances his assertions have little more value as history than the familiar "denunciations" of the policy of the party in power which are so conspicuous in our party platforms. No one, I think, familiar with the diplomatic history of the administrations from 1820 to 1846, or with the steadily

¹⁸ Benton, *Thirty Years' View*, II, 469, 477.

¹⁹ See Allibone, *Dictionary of Authors*; art. Benton.

²⁰ The history of the diffusion of the story that Marcus Whitman saved Oregon by his efforts in 1842-43 is given in my *Essays on Historical Criticisms*, New York, 1901, pp. 8-54.

increasing spirit of territorial expansion pervading the American people west of the Atlantic seaboard, could ever be convinced without the presentation of irrefutable evidence that there was even any likelihood, much less any danger that the American government, once having secured a foothold on the Pacific, would relinquish it for any consideration whatever. Its stand was explicitly taken 1826 when Mr. Gallatin, our minister to England, was authorized "to propose" the extension of the line on the parallel of 49 from the Stony Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. "This," wrote Secretary Clay, in June of that year, "is our ultimatum and you may so announce it; we can consent to no line more favorable to Great Britain." In the following August Secretary Clay repeated the statement to Mr. Gallatin, "The President can not consent that the boundary on the northwest coast should be south of 49."²¹

It would be interesting to dwell briefly upon other aspects of early Oregon history, such as the earlier Oregon literature, to estimate the contribution to popular interest in that far off Pacific Northwest of the fact that Washington Irving, the most eminent living prose writer of the country, found in the history of the Astoria adventure material for his pen not unlike that which had occupied him earlier in following the voyages of the companions of Columbus, or to enlarge upon the learning and critical scholarship which characterize Greenhow's *History of Oregon* and give it a very high place among the historical productions of that day. Or, on the other hand, to dwell upon the origin of the missions, both Catholic and Protestant, and to compare the mission work with the early efforts of Eliot and his coadjutors in Massachusetts and

²¹ *House Executive Documents*, 42d Congress 3d Session. *Foreign Relations*. Vol. on *The Berlin Arbitration*. *Memorial of the United States* by George Bancroft, p. 6, and appendix, pp. 24-25.

with those of the Jesuits in New France. Such comparisons, however, would prolong my paper beyond its allotted time.

In coming so great a distance to speak to an audience upon the history of their own home one can not help a certain feeling of perplexity as to what can be said that is new or that will be interesting. I feel sure, however, that fixing the date and place and author of the proposal to give the name *Oregon* to this Northwest will be new to some of you, and interesting to all of you; and I hope that you will be disposed to follow me when I urge that in your State, and in this Northwest, far greater honor and celebrity should be accorded to John Floyd of Virginia than has been done in the past. He, more than any one of his day, was the unwearied prophet of the commercial future of the Pacific Northwest. Certainly his speeches and reports should be reprinted and made accessible, and he should have some lasting and conspicuous memorial.

The day of bitter sectionalism is passing and the country is more united than ever before. What better symbol of this larger unity could there be than some notable memorial in this great Northwest to the Southern statesman who was its prophet and champion, who gave it its historic name and who first asserted the Pacific Ocean to be the natural boundary of his country and all in less than twenty years after the Louisiana Purchase.

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